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# Hellifield railway staff in bygone days

## by Ken Leak

It is hard to believe that the population of Hellifield was once dominated by railway company employees and their families. The Midland Railway Company and the Lancashire and Railway Company were both keen to provide housing for its employees. Both Midland Terrace and Lancashire & Yorkshire Terrace are familiar street names, but many people will not associate the names of these streets with the Railway Companies who actually had them constructed – solely for the purpose of housing their employees.

With the emergence of Hellifield as an important passenger and freight location, the population of the village rapidly expanded during the Victorian period. In 1881 the census shows a population of 256. By 1895 this had risen to 672, with almost two thirds of

the village workforce employed by the railway companies or in occupations connected to the railway industry. More houses were constructed as the village grew, with familiar names such as Brook Street, Thorndale Street, and Haw Grove appearing. These streets



*Midland Railway staff in 1895 pose for the staff photograph. In the front row, centre with beard is the Station Master Robert Tudor. The boys in the photo were employed by W.H. Smith who had a bookstall on the platform, to deliver and sell newspapers and magazines on the Station.*

were not solely constructed by the Railway Companies themselves, but would certainly house a rising railway workforce.

At all hours of the day, the village streets would see railwaymen going to and from their place of work. The sounds of shunting, plus the passage of trains, would cloak the village in a haze of steam and the smell of steam and coal would fill the air.

Included in this article are some photos of staff who would have lived and worked in Hellifield during the busy

Victorian and Edwardian Railway period. Most are unnamed and many of these men would move on to other locations. As a workforce they were beholden to the Railway Companies for their housing and livelihoods. But as a general rule they were grateful for a relatively secure occupation. With the benefits of a uniform, a supply of easily accessible coal for their tied houses and a reasonable standard of living compared to many of their fellow men, the railway workers of over 100 years ago knew exactly which way up their bread was buttered!



*An interesting view of the Station prior to 1911, when the Signal Box was located on the other side of the tracks to where it stands now.*



*Inspector Frank Syers poses at the foot of the South Junction (current) Signalbox steps circa 1912. Frank would visit the signalbox daily to check on staff and inspect and sign the Signalbox Train Register Book. The Syers family lived in Hellifield for many years.*



*A family snapshot from around 1910 donated to me by Hellifield resident Neil Edwards of Midland Terrace. The men seated in a garden on Midland Terrace were all employed by the Midland Railway as Guards.*



*And not just the men! Here we have women cleaners on board a Johnson 4-4-0 locomotive. No. 311. The engine stands near the carriage sidings at the rear of the Midland Loco Shed during the WW1 period. More women were employed to replace the men away on active service during this period.*